

House Republican Press Release

August 18, 2005
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Rell Signs Rep. Fahrbach Legislation Banning Traffic Signal Preemption Devices



Hartford-On Monday, July 11, Governor M. Jodi Rell signed legislation into law introduced by State Representative Ruth Fahrbach, R-Windsor, that prohibits using a traffic signal preemption device for non-emergency purposes. A traffic signal preemption device is a device capable of changing a traffic control signal or altering the timing or phasing of the signal. Public Act 05-242 took effect upon Governor Rell's signature.

According to the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research (OLR), the legislation specifically prohibits an unauthorized person from possessing a traffic signal preemption device and prohibits the device, with exceptions, from being in or part of a motor vehicle. It also prohibits someone from selling or transferring a preemption device except in certain circumstances. Exceptions permitted include people installing or maintaining a traffic control signal and those who are operating a police or fire vehicle or ambulance responding to an emergency.

Traffic signal preemption devices that make upcoming traffic lights turn green and are primarily used by police, fire and ambulance vehicles, in order to expedite their route to an emergency. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the most common form of these devices is a mobile infrared transmitter (MIRT). When activated, an MIRT emits a coded frequency to a receiver in the traffic light to either remain green or change to green for the oncoming vehicle. The signal also changes the light to red for all other directions.

A 2002 survey by the U.S. Department of Transportation found that in the 78 largest cities in the United States, 381 transportation agencies had equipped 27,000 intersections with signal preemption capabilities. Although signal preemption has many benefits, state and local officials are increasingly concerned about the public use of this technology.

“Unfortunately, these devices have been purchased by non-emergency personnel,” said Rep. Fahrbach. “While there is currently no federal law banning them, I believe the potential for serious traffic accidents and the ability to delay emergency vehicles from reaching their destinations is sufficient reason to restrict their use to police and emergency vehicles in Connecticut.”

